

VZCZCXRO4549
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #0654/01 0740133
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 140133Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0134
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 6328
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 2772
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 3504
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0261
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000654

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: EAP DAS STRESSES NEED TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON BURMA

REF: A. SECSTATE 22937

1B. MANILA 282 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In meetings with senior Philippine government officials at the Presidential Palace and Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as foreign diplomats and the Embassy community, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel underscored the USG's continuing efforts to produce concrete moves toward democracy in Burma. Together with Ambassador Kenney, DAS Marciel reiterated U.S. appreciation for the Philippine government's continued strong stance on Burma, particularly at the last ASEAN summit in Singapore and at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this year. Arriving on the eve of UN Special Advisor Gambari's March 6 visit to Burma, DAS Marciel noted that the Burmese regime could demonstrate its seriousness about making democratic reforms by beginning a genuine dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and others. He also voiced deep concern over the regime's planned May referendum on a draft constitution, which lacked any opposition input or review. Philippine officials assured DAS Marciel that they would continue to press Burma to show progress toward democracy. Subsequently, President Arroyo again publicly criticized the Burmese junta, saying its decision to reject foreign observers for the May referendum was "a sad day for democracy and our region." END SUMMARY.

ENCOURAGING CONTINUED PHILIPPINE SUPPORT

12. (SBU) DAS Marciel joined the Ambassador for a March 3 meeting at Malacanang Palace with Presidential Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, where the Ambassador expressed

SIPDIS

appreciation for President Arroyo's outspoken support for clear and concrete steps toward democratization on the part of the Burmese regime. DAS Marciel noted that public pressure on the Burmese junta would continue to be necessary, and that support was especially important coming from fellow ASEAN countries such as the Philippines. Acting Assistant Secretary for American Affairs Lourdes Yparraguirre, who

SIPDIS

represented the Department of Foreign Affairs at the meeting, welcomed these observations.

13. (SBU) Subsequently, President Arroyo publicly denounced March 9 the Burmese junta's rejection of a UN proposal to monitor the planned constitutional referendum in May, calling

on the Burmese government to "do the right thing" and allow outside observers. President Arroyo said that allowing outside observers would be a small but modest step towards democratization that was "long overdue in Myanmar." She bluntly characterized the junta's rejection of the UN proposal as a "sad day for democracy and our region."

14. (SBU) DAS Marciel discussed Burma issues at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in a March 3 meeting with Assistant Secretary Romeo Manalo and Executive Director Hellen Barber

SIPDIS

of the Asian and Pacific Affairs Office. DAS Marciel thanked Manalo and the DFA for their consistent support (ref B) on Burma and expressed concerns (ref A) about the Burmese regime's plans for a constitutional referendum, which he said lack the means either to assure credibility and transparency, or to allow the opposition to review or provide input on the draft constitution. DAS Marciel explained the U.S. position on Burma as supportive of UN efforts to encourage a genuine dialogue leading to a political transition. Although the U.S. spoke out more strongly than most countries on Burma, there was in fact much agreement among concerned countries on the need for national reconciliation and a more inclusive political process. The U.S. understood that a transition likely would take time, and that the military would continue to play a role in the process. We were focusing our efforts on encouraging the international community to continue to work together to press the Burmese regime to open its political process and begin a genuine dialogue. The U.S. had serious concerns about the upcoming referendum, but encouraged ASEAN and other nations to support clear benchmarks by which its credibility and fairness could be measured. Manalo noted these points and reiterated support for efforts to increase international pressure on the Burmese regime. Manalo agreed that a legitimate dialogue leading to democratic reforms was an important goal and that freeing political prisoners should serve as a benchmark of Burma's progress.

MANILA 00000654 002 OF 002

BURMA DIPLOMACY WITH OTHER MISSIONS

15. (SBU) The Ambassador hosted a private breakfast on March 3 for DAS Marciel with Ambassadors from Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and Singapore, where DAS Marciel described the current situation in Burma and steered the discussion toward promoting a sense of collective responsibility. DAS Marciel also discussed ways that all countries -- especially ASEAN countries -- could support the current Gambari mission to Burma. The Ambassador underscored that the so-called "likeminded Ambassadors" (Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK) had been strong partners, which all parties concurred had helped the Philippines be a stalwart supporter of efforts to democratize Burma.

BRIEFING U.S. EMBASSY STAFF

16. (SBU) DAS Marciel discussed U.S. policy on Burma with Embassy staff during an informal reception at the Ambassador's residence March 4. The Embassy staff included entry-level officers, Country Team members, and U.S. Military and USAID officials. DAS Marciel provided insights on how the Burmese regime's harsh rule had stunted Burma's economic, political and social growth, and resulted in rising levels of poverty, ethnic tension and disease for those outside of the ruling elite. Entry-level officers were especially engaged as DAS Marciel offered thoughts on the techniques and challenges of crafting Burma policy in Washington and articulating it abroad.

17. (U) DAS Marciel cleared this cable.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's
Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov>.
KENNEY